

A CHARTER OF SULTAN BĀDĪ B. NŌL OF SINNĀR, 1145/1732-3

JAY SPAULDING

One of the earliest extant charters from Sinnār lies imbedded in a longer genealogical work, hitherto known through a copy preserved in the National Records Office in Khartoum.¹ Professor P.M. Holt has published an extended discussion of this document, together with a careful English translation.² Dr. R.S. O’Fahey has most generously invited me to comment upon a new version of the same charter as it appears in a second manuscript, and in his judgement probably the original, which he has found among the papers of Douglas Newbold in the Sudan Archive, University of Durham.³

The surviving charter is at best incomplete. The author of the genealogical work explained that he was copying the charter ‘letter by letter’ from an original document that was in his possession at that time, but he did not claim to have reproduced the entire document; indeed, he specifically mentioned the existence of seals and an introduction that were not copied. Detailed comparison with other surviving Funj charters would seem to confirm both of these statements; while substantial portions of the document were apparently omitted, the passages present do tend to inspire confidence

1 National Records Office, Khartoum. Intelligence 5/1/3, ‘Nisba of Ahmed al-Azhari.’

2 P.M. Holt, ‘The genealogy of a Sudanese holy family,’ *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, xliv, 1981, 262-72; the charter under consideration here is translated on pp. 268-9.

3 Sudan Archive, University of Durham, G//S 555(4), uncatalogued, from the papers of Douglas Newbold. Aḥmad b. Ismā‘īl al-Azhārī, *Khulāṣat al-iqtibās fī ’tṭiṣāl nasabīnā bi’l-sayyid al-‘Abbās*.

in regard to their authenticity by virtue of their conformity to the conventions of the genre. By the same criterion, Dr. O’Fahey’s manuscript from Durham would indeed seem preferable to the version in Khartoum. Conspicuously, the former contains the verb bearing the act of confirmation for which purpose the charter was issued, while the corresponding passage of the latter conveys the meaning only indirectly via an awkward verbless sentence. The Durham manuscript couches the discourse of the charter in the first person, while the Khartoum manuscript renders it in the third. In view of these discrepancies an improved reading of this charter would be appropriate.

Text

The following is the text of the charter as given by the Durham manuscript; variations in the Khartoum version are indicated in the footnotes.

هذا الجاه كتبه⁴ للفيقيه بشارة ابن الفيقيه على بن برسي⁵
 بان لا يتعرض عليه / واخوانه واولاده واصهاره واهله
 وجميع من ينسب اليه او يلتجي به
 بان / لا يتعرض عليه احد من العمال⁶ الذين في البلاد
 وانا⁷ السلطان بادي ابن / السلطان نول تمت⁸ ما

4 Intelligence 5/1/3 reads كتبه .

5 Intelligence 5/1/3 vocalizes to read ‘Bursī.’

6 Charters from Sinnār would more normally use the terms *shuyūkh* and *maqādīm*; *ummāl*, a term typical of the Mahdist period, may be a copyist’s anachronistic interpolation.

7 Intelligence 5/1/3 places a space between the *ālif* and the *nūn*, probably by mistake.

8 Missing from Intelligence 5/1/3.

فعله السلطان بادي ابن السلطان ارباط⁹ من / تجويه
 الفقيه بشارة ابن الفقيه علي ابن برسي هو ومن معه
 جاهها لله وللرسول / حرمه للدين وجاهه الذي في يده
 من بعده

لا يطلب عليه لا حسب ولا عادة / ولا عانة ولا قوار
 ولا جباية ولا علوق ولا متورت ولا شي قل او جل¹⁰
 من جميع مضار السلطنة لا في الحضر ولا في السفر ان
 شرقوا او غربوا¹¹ /

فكل من تعرض له او دناه لا يلومن¹² الا نفسه والحذر
 الحذر من الخلف والمخالف / لا يلومن الا نفسه انتهى

Translation

[The translation below reproduces that of Professor Holt except where otherwise indicated. His notes regarding the possible meaning of the names of the immunities have been omitted.¹³]

This is the charter of immunity which I have written¹⁴

- 9 If authentic, a grant by this seventeenth-century ruler would be one of the oldest presently known from the charter literature of Sinnār.
- 10 Intelligence 5/1/3 vocalizes to read 'jalla.'
- 11 Intelligence 5/1/3 uses the IVth form of these verbs.
- 12 The use of the emphatic is not common in the charters from Sinnār.
- 13 For an extended discussion see Jay Spaulding, *The Heroic Age in Sinnār*, East Lansing: African Studies Center, Michigan State University 1985, 79-91.
- 14 Previous reading (Holt, 'Genealogy,' 268), '[The sultan] has written

for the *faqīh* Bishāra son of the *faqīh* °Alī b. Bursī, that no one shall oppose him, his brethern, his sons, his affinity,¹⁵ his family and all who are his kindred and connected with him.

Let none of the tax-collectors (°*ummāl*)¹⁶ who are in the country interfere with him.

I, Sultan Bādī son of Sultan Nōl, have confirmed what Sultan Bādī son of Sultan Arbāt has done in his grant of immunity to¹⁷ the *faqīh* Bishāra son of the *faqīh* °Alī b. Bursī, himself and whoever is with him, immunity for the sake of God and the Apostle, and out of respect to religion, and immunity for whoever has possession after him.

Let no one demand *ḥasab*, °*āda*, °*āna*, *quwār*, *jibāya*, °*alūq*, *matūra*, nor anything whether little or much of all the impositions of the sultanate, whether in residence or in travel, whether they are in the east or the west.

Let anyone who interferes with him or approaches him [wrongfully] blame only himself. Beware of disobedience. Let the disobedient blame only himself.

this charter of immunity.’

15 Affines, kinsmen by marriage.

16 A free reading for ‘officials’ or ‘functionaries.’

17 Previous reading (Holt, ‘Genealogy,’ 268), ‘Sultan Bādī son of Sultan Nōl has confirmed the act of Sultan Bādī son of Sultan Irbāt, giving...’